

VDFP LOGBOOK

Virginia Department of Fire Programs Newsletter

Volume 1, Issue 2

HURRICANE ISSUE

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Words of Thanks:
Executive Director
and VFSB Chairman

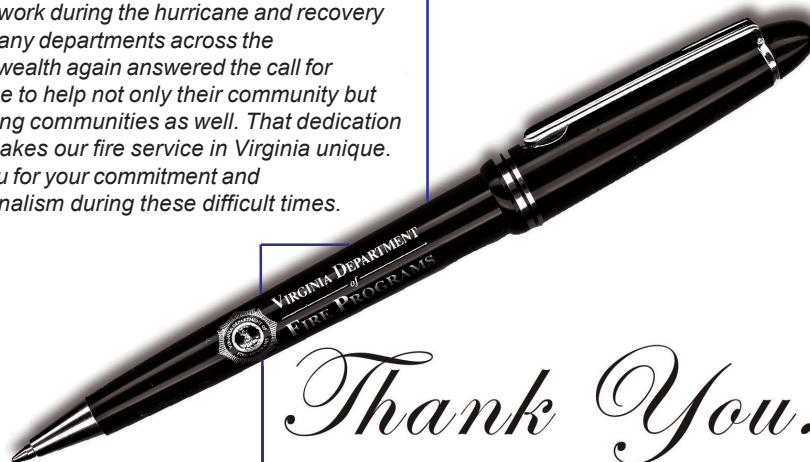
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Phil Paquette--Chairman, VFSB Board

I would like to take this opportunity to show the Fire Services Boards' appreciation for your dedication and teamwork during the hurricane and recovery efforts. Many departments across the Commonwealth again answered the call for assistance to help not only their community but neighboring communities as well. That dedication is what makes our fire service in Virginia unique. Thank you for your commitment and professionalism during these difficult times.



Thank You.

Adam Thiel--Executive Director VDFP



As this second issue of the VDFP Logbook is mailed, we know many of your departments are still recovering from Hurricane Isabel. So are we. To date, VDFP has contributed more than 7,500 staff hours toward statewide preparation, response, and recovery efforts; but we know there is much left to do and our commitment will not falter until the work is done.

Whether they were helping staff the Virginia Emergency Operations Center, providing technical assistance and incident management support to localities, assisting VDEM/FEMA with disaster recovery efforts, or ensuring the continuity of daily operations—I am so proud of our entire VDFP team for stepping forward to “make it happen” before, during, and after the storm.

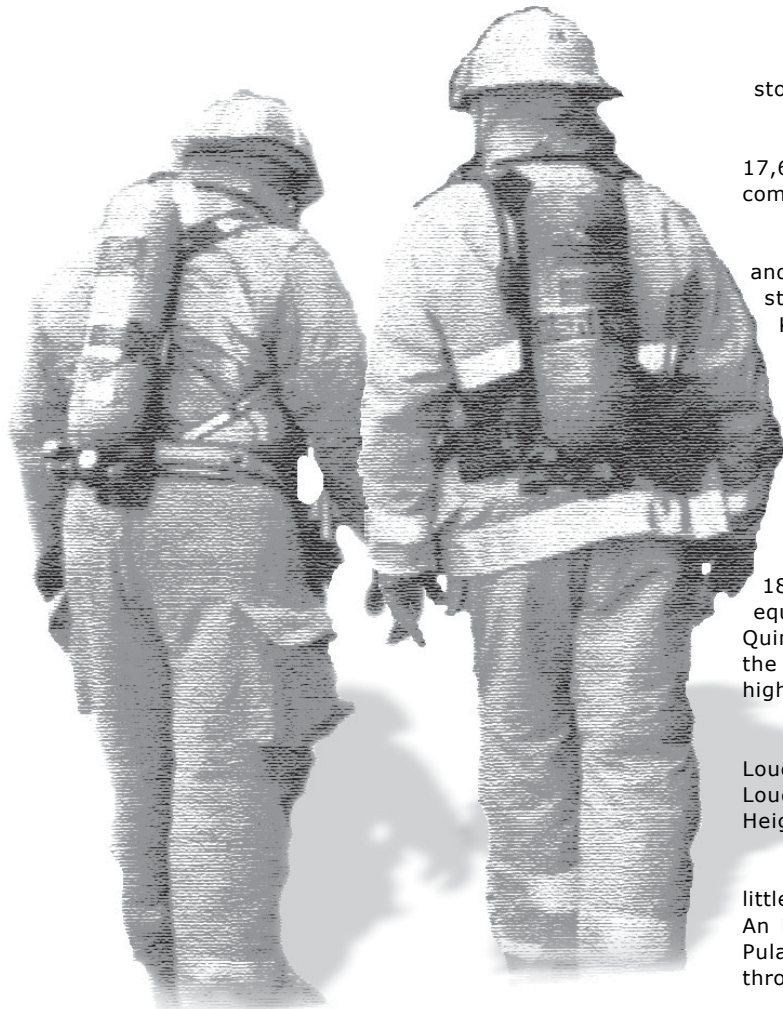
At the same time, we are all humbled by the courage and dedication shown time and again by the members of local fire and rescue departments across the Commonwealth as they stood in harm's way to protect the lives and property of others; even as their own homes were affected. In spite of the unprecedented destruction wrought by Isabel, we know it would have been much worse without your efforts. So, on behalf of the Virginia Department of Fire Programs, thank you.

If there is any way we might help your department and its members in the aftermath of this devastating storm, please do not hesitate to contact your VDFP area/division manager; or call me directly at (804) 371-0220.

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November 2003

A STATEWIDE MUTUAL AID SUCCESS STORY



Many communities were hit hard by the storm including Colonial Heights.

Colonial Heights supports a population of 17,600 within an 8-square mile radius. The community posted 100 calls in a four hour span.

"The winds had risen to more than 50 mph and units were ordered to report back to their stations," says Colonial Heights' Battalion Chief Kenny Frenier. "Calls were still coming in, but responses were suspended, except for life threatening situations."

It was evident that Colonial Heights' storm damage was well beyond their resources. A call for statewide mutual aid went out to the VEOC.

Approximately 12:20 a.m., on September 18, a firefighting task force from Loudoun County, equipped with an engine company, an EMS unit, a Quint and two vans loaded with 25 members began the trek to Colonial Heights through pounding rain, high winds and the occasional road block.

"We were getting pretty slammed in Loudoun," says Scott Cullers, Battalion Chief with the Loudoun County Fire Department. "But the Colonial Heights department was in a desperate situation."

The group arrived just after 3 a.m. and in a little more than three hours was up and ready for duty. An Emergency Medical Services (EMS) task force from Pulaski County also arrived in Colonial Heights through the VEOC and Office of EMS.

Loudoun apparatus and personnel were assigned a station with a representative from Colonial Heights on board. These liaisons served as guides to the city, and provided communication to the Colonial Heights dispatch center. The system worked extremely well.

"Loudoun County's and Pulaski County's assistance allowed our staff to come off the street and get some needed rest," added Frenier. "We could not have asked for better."

Loudoun remained in the area for days until calls for service dropped to a manageable level.

This story illustrates how statewide mutual-aid can really work to help local departments in disaster situations, adds Thiel. "Both Colonial Heights and Loudoun County demonstrated the highest ideas of the fire-rescue service under extreme conditions.

There are times when even firefighters require a little assistance.

This was the case throughout the Commonwealth when the power of Hurricane Isabel visited the Mid-Atlantic area.

The resulting wide-spread damage, which stretched from North Carolina to Northern Virginia and as far west as the Blue Ridge Mountains, had fire departments and their members pushed to the limits.

"The volume of calls for emergency assistance received was tremendous," says Adam Thiel, executive director of the Virginia Department of Fire Programs.

For two weeks, the VDFP in concert with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) and Virginia Department of Forestry (VDOF), helped coordinate fire service resources statewide from the Virginia Emergency Operations Center (VEOC).

VDFP MOBILE INCIDENT SUPPORT TEAM MAKES FIRST RESPONSE

The Virginia Department of Fire Programs, in cooperation with the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (DEM), has been working to create Mobile Incident Support Teams (MISTs) statewide to help local departments implement management systems during major incidents.

As Hurricane Isabel made landfall, the Commonwealth immediately began experiencing high winds, resulting in extensive amounts of downed trees and power lines. Moderate to heavy rains accompanied the storm surge and produced inland flooding.

Gloucester County was hit especially hard. During the height of the storm, emergency personnel from the Gloucester area reported to the Virginia Emergency Operation Center (VEOC) that 30-40 people were missing or stranded in the southeastern portion of the county.

Friday morning, at Gloucester County's request, a Mobile Incident Support Team (MIST) consisting of Bob Rhea, Tom Berry, Rick Koonce, and Tommy Lorton was deployed to the area to provide technical assistance and operational support.

Fortunately, by the time MIST arrived, the initial assessment of 30-40 people missing had been reduced to approximately 14.

"It was a case of broken communication," says Bob Rhea, VDFP Area 3 Manager.

"During the height of the storm some residences called 911 to request assistance, but follow-up attempts to contact these individuals were unsuccessful."

The operation moved from a search and recovery operation, to one of accountability and verification. These efforts were supported by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries,

the National Guard, the Virginia Department of Forestry, and the Virginia State Police.

Soon the list of unaccounted-for residences had been reduced by half.

The success of this effort hinged on the ability to communicate between the various stations and other agencies involved, but Isabel was making that a difficult task.

"Essentially, we were operating out of 2 stations—one in Abingdon and another in Bena," recalls Berry. "There was no communication between the two stations because cell phones, landlines, and department mobile radios were rendered ineffective or inoperable by the storm."

By positioning VDFP vehicles at both stations, the MIST was able to serve as a manual repeater system and overcome their communication problems.

"It all worked out," added Rhea "By 12:00 pm, all individuals had been located and accounted for and we were subsequently released."

Adam Thiel, VDFP executive director is optimistic about the future of deploying regional MISTs.

"While we certainly have a long way to go to fully implement regional MISTs, our experience during Isabel validated the concept and we look forward to working with our state and local partners to provide this resource as needed."

This issue highlights only two of many success stories arising from the statewide response to Hurricane Isabel.

To help provide "lessons learned," we need YOUR stories from Isabel.

Let us know about your department's experience. Selected stories will be made available on our website at www.vafire.com.





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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

NOVEMBER

2003 Virginia Public Safety Outreach
Conference
Dates: November 19-21

DECEMBER

Fire Inspector and Investigator
Recertification Event
Dates: December 3-5
(Fort Picket Blackstone, VA)

Virginia Fire Services Board Meeting in
Richmond
Dates: December 4-5

FEBRUARY

Virginia Training Officer's Group Meeting
Date: February 27
during State Chief's Conference
(Virginia Beach, VA)

**Please let us know about your
department's experience during
Hurricane Isabel. Selected stories will
be made available on our website at
www.vafire.com; email Alfonzo Mathis
at amathis@vdftp.state.va.us.**